

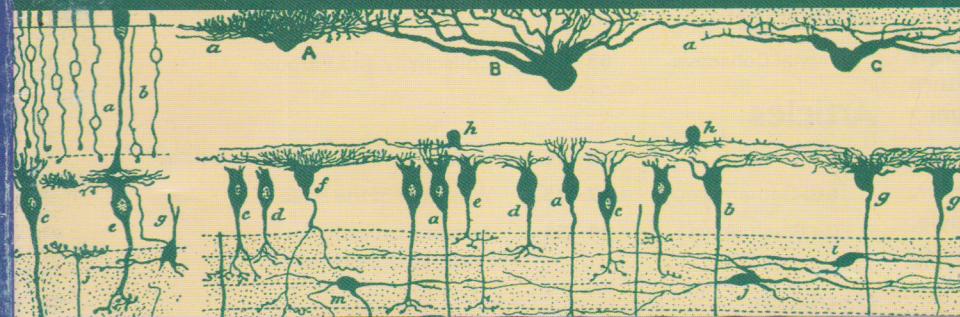
Fall 2002

# ARSENAL

A Magazine of Anarchist Strategy and Culture

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Fall 2002

# #5 CONTENTS

## ARSENAL

a magazine of anarchist  
strategy and culture  
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## Editorial

Arsenal Collective	03-06	Collectivity and Purpose
--------------------	-------	--------------------------

## Articles

Matt Hern	08-16	Getting up in Globalization's Face
Jean-Bernard Pouy	17-25	Wretched of the Rails
Lisa Brash Spice	31-35	Arm in Arm with Princess Gonorrhea

## Reviews

Butch Lee	28-29	Days of War, Nights of Love
Mia Culpa	38-39	Saving Private Power

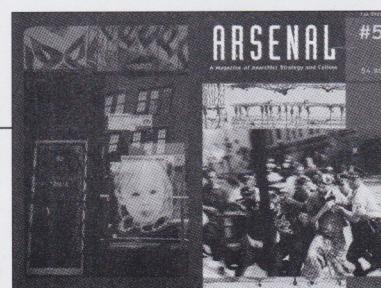
## Columns

Deuce Bigalow & Justine Apostatus	07	Ask a Fallen Comrade
Cindy Milstein	26-27	Outside the Circle

## Art

Raven	F. Cover	Photograph
Raven	15 & 16	Photographs
Laurence Betriot	17	Book cover design
Youssouf Toure	20-21	Illustration
Josh MacPhee	37	Stencil
Vic Speedwell	B. Cover	Photograph

Photo by Vic Speedwell;  
Poster (in window) by A.T.M.

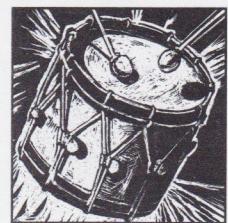


Untitled photo  
by Raven.

# Collectivity and Purpose: Becoming More Than We Are

*It is nevertheless beyond doubt that this disorganisation derives from some defects of theory; notably from a false interpretation of the principle of individual anarchism; this theory being too often confused with the absence of all responsibility. The lovers of assertion of 'self', solely with a view to personal pleasure, obstinately cling to the chaotic state of the anarchist movement and refer in its defense to the immutable principles of anarchism and its teachers.*

**Dielo Trouda, The Organisational Platform of Libertarian Communists**



Maybe we should abandon the idea that one can be an individual anarchist, and propose instead that there are only anarchists plural. Since anarchism argues for a vision of social life that rejects the individual isolation we experience under capitalism and the state, it makes sense that only in groups can this new society be envisioned, struggled for, and created.

Certainly, much of current anarchist practice expresses a wish for anarchists to "come together." The positive aspect of this tendency is the belief that radical action must belong to many. Winning, surviving, sharing: none of our motivations make sense without that possibility of becoming more than separate persons, of cracking the shell of individuality that means isolation, futility, and ignorance. It's not really so much a question of whether anarchists will work in groups, but rather, of what sort.

The wish to come together has its risks, of course. The negative side of the tendency is complacency in the easiest kinds of community: simulated, commodified, or sensational. The worst deformations of anarchist collectivity have been challenged in this magazine and elsewhere. It is important, however, to see the extent of the danger. Our wishes

may be so strong as to cloud our recognition of their fulfillment. In this way, the instability of the ad-hoc group and the institutionalization of the permanent group are similar. Both lose sight of the permanent process of anarchist politics: always becoming free and becoming human.

## ingredients of success

When anarchist collectives succeed, it is not random and not a coincidence. It takes intention and effort to produce a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. Action, pulls us toward the new society we struggle to create. Self-education and propaganda are key ingredients in the transformation of ourselves and society.

The long, hard road of socializing ourselves for a world we don't yet know, all while resisting the sorry state we live in now, is surely daunting. Without a strong purpose, resistance is a roadshow with a beginning and an end date. It's a rush for a weekend, but the weekend never lasts, not under capitalism. Intent, a sense of purpose, brings things together—hard work and thrills, resistance and debate, organizing and revolution. Affinity (dynamics, confidence, and trust), Unity (shared politics and strategies),

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and Solidarity (commitment and a willingness to take action) can build our movement for the long term.

Today, as before, anarchists have many ways to define our purpose: slogans, points of unity, platforms, and programs. At whatever scale, the elaboration must be tied to the purpose of everyday reality, making ourselves whole and greater. Our groups must not shy away from taking on the world and its forces. This audacity is in fact necessary to the hope for revolution. At the same time, our purpose cannot take shape at the macro-level alone. A platform that says everything about global capitalism but nothing about life as it is lived becomes a frozen catechism. The only way to maintain a collective or practice under such motivation is by routine and authority. This route is doomed from the beginning. Instead, our groups must continually keep their work close to the distress and pleasure of realizing life.

### the collective model

Most anarchists in North America today prioritize the collective as a model for organization. There are other formations and types of groups: individual membership organizations, spontaneous and mutable affinity groups conceived for particular actions, and so on. Each has its own set of benefits and problems, and it is not our goal to eliminate them from the anarchist arsenal of tools for revolution. Still, we argue that collectivity, defined for now as a fully democratic and decentralized long-term structure for organizing, represents more than just one model among many. It

connects our present and our future in a strategic and ethical way that bears closer study, not simplistic acceptance or rejection.

As anarchists, plural now, we cannot let collectivity become our sole purpose or our exclusive strategy. We must still identify and initiate campaigns and struggles that foment revolution and win concrete victories; without this, collectivity becomes complacent and unproductive. We need to continue our community work, our participation in social struggles, and our efforts to create a revolutionary culture. Collectivity gives us a leg up in these attempts.

Of course, not all people come to collective process in the same way, or from the same sorts of experience. The differences implied by this fact have been dealt with in many different ways over the past several decades: separate organizations based on identity, autonomous caucuses, various process tactics like "fishbowls," and so on. Each of these strategies and tactics has had historic value for anarchist and other revolutionary organizing, and have failed primarily when they replaced (rather than enhanced) collectivity as a basis of struggle.

### individuals in collectives

When we act as individuals, even (or especially?) in larger groups, we recreate the isolation that capitalism and patriarchy train us for. These oppressive social structures thrive because they utilize the very collectivity they deny us access to. An instructive example is found in the legal meaning of the word "person".

Under US law, a person is any individual entity with rights and responsibilities, which means that corporations are "persons" in the eyes of the law. Corporations are fundamentally anti-democratic, but they operate well under capitalism precisely because they twist potentially collective large group actions into the authoritarian structures that transform corporations into individual "persons," a process that is impossible if employees cannot be made to think of themselves primarily as isolated individuals. Syndicalism is not without its problems, but the effort to engage workers in collective struggles for democratic self-management is surely an important component of any revolutionary strategy for anarchists.

Many people have elaborated on the distinction between individuality and individualism, and we accept the basic argument that the two concepts represent opposed visions of the same reality, the one humanist and potentially revolutionary, the other capitalist and patriarchal. Social action does not mean rejecting individuality; rather individuality is inseparable from truly radical collectivity.

The process we are describing is partly about communication. In the face to face discussions that form the heart of true collectivity, all participants are likely to gain new insights, inspirations, and perspectives they would not have obtained without participation in the collective process. This interplay among comrades and friends is the essence of individuality as we understand it, and it is one way to understand the notion that the whole is



Mural as you enter Serra d' Almos.

greater than the sum of its parts.

### more than a collective

In Catalonia, Spain there is an autonomous municipality (one of a fair number) that has resisted being a part of Spain. This village is called la Serra d' Almos. The area is dry and hilly. Almonds, olives, grapes and more are grown on the farmlands surrounding the winding streets and quirky buildings. All of the productive land is collectivized. Anything in surplus of what is needed by the residents is sold through a co-op.

In the center of the village there is a pub next to a walled courtyard where residents and guests talk, play and listen to music and play games, make festivals for any reason at all. It is a popular hub, with toddlers and grandparents, the plain and fancy dressed making use of the concrete terraces until well past 2 a.m.

This is a community in resistance: the government of Spain wants Serra d'Almos to join the fold. But this is a village that can't be bought: there are no politicians. There are no police. The residents here, and their predecessors, raised money and built their own roads, sewers, schools, the community swimming pool,

everything. They had been promised a water system by the Spanish government and it never materialized. So they built one. When the government offered them money they said, emphatically, "no."

There are arguments. What dynamic and vital population doesn't have arguments? And every May Day the population divides and the anarchists and communists each have their own set of celebrations and protests. What good is Spain to them?

### business

We are very sorry about delays in our production schedule. We will be more aggressive about getting out issue number six.

If you are interested in planning the Fourth Annual Midwest

Anarchist Bookfair & Variety Show (with Anarchist Film Festival, Propaganda Gallery, and more) to take place in Chicago May 2-4 get in touch—we want your help and input. Send in film, flag, and poster contributions, and mark your calendar!

*Arsenal* is available at \$ 4 an issue, or \$14 for a subscription of four issues directly from the editorial collective. Institutions pay \$ 28 for a subscription in the U.S. Contact us for wholesale or overseas prices. *Arsenal* magazine is available in Chicago at Earwax, Reckless Records, New World Resource Center, Quimby's, and the Autonomous Zone. Tree of Knowledge Press, AK Press, Left Bank, and others distribute *Arsenal* wholesale and/or retail.

Rudy the beagle died in July 2002. He is missed.

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# ARSENAL

A Magazine of Anarchist Strategy and Culture



# ASK A FALLEN COMRADE

Dear John Brown,

I'm writing because I should be totally happy. My study group is slammin' and my fourteen housemates rock. We share everything. So I don't have any private property to sink me into the owning class, not even the 300ZX my folks gave me when I graduated high school because I'd been wanting one all my life.

My group fleshed out for me how my parents with their mantle of authority were just rewarding conformity as I jumped through the state-mandated hoop of "education." I also learned how they and my "education" merely readied me for a lifetime of oppression as a worker in the capitalist system by dangling the carrot of early admission into the so-called "ivy league." Luckily I was able to reject these values in time to avoid attending Harvard. Instead I've had this job for a couple months now.

I can only admit this to you, John, but my working-class job sucks.

It's minimum wage, it's mindless, I'm at the beck and call of any asshole with 99 cents, and I'm pretty sure the headset I'm forced to wear when I'm on drive thru will give me brain cancer. Somehow, I feel less like a proletarian dictator, and more like a servant of The Man, than ever. Of course I can't tell any of my friends that I hate my job. That would be in defiance of worker solidarity, and the criticism round would be endless. I know I deserve it. I know ambition is a tool of capitalism! But, though it fills me with shame, I have to admit

I'm ready to look for a job where "raises" aren't discussed in dime increments and the tool of my trade isn't a mayonnaise gun. Be assured that I hate myself for internalizing ambition. Sessions of self-criticism have failed to help. Can you?

ps. Don't tell me to start a union drive for better working conditions.

No improvements could make nine hours of repeating "super size that for 99 cents?" bearable.

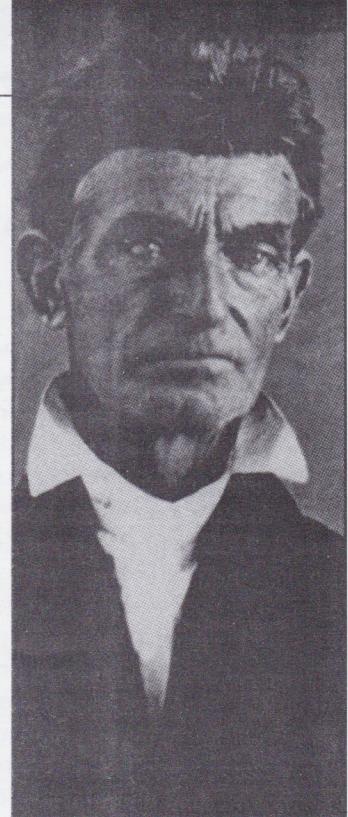
## Flippin' Out

Dear Flippin',

I know well long hours of work for little reward. But take it from a debtor, a failed land speculator, a father of 20 who couldn't provide for his family, you never know when the next Depression is around the corner. You might want to hold on to that job.

Though you describe yourself as a servant, you fail to say whether you own your own life. If you can think of leaving your toil "on drive thru," your employment seems different from enslavement; your status unlikely to qualify as a crime of the sort that will never be purged away but with blood.

Yet if it is of that sort, and you are a person of conscience as you seem to be, you have no choice but to take action. Even extreme action. Be prepared to take aim with your "mayonnaise gun." It is better that a whole generation of men, women, and children pass away by violent death than that evil be allowed to flourish. You'll find no better use for your life than to lay it down in the cause of freedom.



John Brown

Life is long, and the meaning of life can just as easily be found at its end. I am worth inconceivably more to hang than for any other purpose. Maybe you too will be lucky enough to make the gallows your cross.

Be joyful in your tribulations,

**Old John Brown**

# GETTING UP IN GLOBALIZATION'S FACE UNDERMINING STATE SCHOOLING & MAKING LEARNING ACTUALLY PUBLIC

by Matt Hern

You'd have to work hard not be thrilled by the anti-globalization movement's energy and strength, but genuinely lasting success is only going to come with an aggressively decentralist agenda. The core of capitalist globalization is a virulent pattern of bureaucratized centralization: a bold thrust for near-total economic and political control by corporate culture and state power. The attempt to loose capital from existing restrictions and create a one-world, 24-7 accessible market everywhere is the logic and language of universalism gone berserk, and the only effective counter to that logic resides in popular community power.

But community power, decentralizing power, is not what much of the anti-globalization movement is talking about. The important argument that one hears in so many anti-globalization discourses is that governments are all that protect us from corporate power. It is a line of thinking that everyone is familiar with, and it is ludicrous. I cannot imagine what more it will take to make it obvious that corporate power and state power go hand in hand, supporting and rationalizing one another. How many more GATTs, NAFTAs, APECs, WTOs, G-9s, E-20s, do we need?

The antithesis of globalization has

to be local power, local control and local politics: municipalization, community governance, decentralized power, whatever, but we have to turn aggressively on institutions that are centralizing power and return control to local hands.

To my mind there is no better place to start than state schools. Schools are all about massive economic concentration and bureaucratic control, of community resources: schooling is the largest single employer in the U.S. and the second biggest grantor of contracts after the Defense Department.

Describing state schools as public is emblematic of the confusion of our time. Schools are available to most everyone, mostly free and created with tax money; but would you call prisons public? They fit the same criteria. How about the military? These are state institutions, and they do not meet the criteria of democratic control that the term public suggests. School boards are elected, but does that make police departments "public" or democratically controlled because you can vote for the sheriff?

Only in the most limited sense. In the same way that citizens have essentially no impact on prison conditions or the death penalty, families have perilously little control over schools. Democracy is reduced to lobbying and



A scene from Jean Vigo's film, Zero for Conduct

consultation, and elite interests prevail.

There has to be a way to change this to make child-rearing a radically democratic project with community resources allocated by communities, and with families and kids in charge of their own education. That is: to make growing up an actually public event. The project of making learning genuinely public is like making our democracy actually democratic. It has to be a radically decentralized, community-driven project.

So what are some anarchist answers? What makes a project anarchist?

It is possible to avoid dogmatism and still consider how anarchist principles like mutual aid and local power might be manifested, at institutional, familial, and

pédagogical levels. There are some compelling counter-institutions that exemplify what I consider to be the best of libertarian-left principles.

And here lies the dilemma: it is always worth examining models, both for general and specific application, but there is a danger. When trying to figure out what can be done to counter globalization or create alternatives to compulsory state schooling, there are examples and inspirations everywhere. But they are not answers. Local institutions have to be locally generated, because they are constructed in response to specific desires and circumstances.

Alternatives to school are emerging, and if they can be pieced together politically and culturally, the logic of state schooling will collapse.



Children painting a new mural in Serra d' Almos' village center.

# GETTING UP



Consider these:

## taking over public schools

I have no faith in "revolution from within" strategies, especially as a larger approach but there are often ways to hijack specific schools. There are two good examples here in British Columbia. In Lund, a small mill town on the Sunshine Coast, students were withdrawing from the local government-run elementary school in such numbers that the school board saw no reason to continue to operate the school and shut it down. In response, the community of Lund bought the building themselves, took over stewardship of the facility and it now operates as an independent school/meeting place for homeschooled kids K-12.

A different version of the story is Windsor House, a public free school in North Vancouver that I have worked with for a long time. It began more than thirty years ago in Helen Hughes' living room when she realized how unhappy her daughter was in school and let her stay home instead. Over

the course of the next three decades, the school evolved into a play group and then a small independent school and then became a public school program and through slow and steady growth is now a thriving and growing K-10 free school with 170 students and our own building.

Windsor House currently has full public funding and can accept families from all over the city, despite our radical pedagogy. The school is run on a directly democratic model, all rules are made and voted on by school council, classes and formal activities are offered by request and are entirely optional for every age. There is no required attendance, curriculum is entirely self-designed, parents are invited to participate in every aspect of school life and kids of all ages are encouraged to take their learning into the community.

Every aspect of Windsor House flies in the face of conventional schooling, and yet it retains school board support and full state funding.

The reasons are many and unique to the circumstance, and are not duplicated anywhere that I know of. The combination of Helen's political savvy, the school's ability to work with difficult kids that other schools don't want, a strong parent body, sympathetic administrators and coincidences have combined to allow WH to carve out a radical space, a temporary autonomous zone if you will, in a Kafka-esque and famously ill-run school district.

## independent schools

In virtually every city and district on the continent there are

independent schools. The vast majority are religious schools run by churches and mosques and synagogues because genuinely independent schools are a huge project to maintain physically and financially. Still, there are more or less secular alternative schools all over: Montessori, Waldorf, Pestalozzi, wholistic, native, multiple intelligence, traditional, democratic etc. etc. These schools are mostly not that interesting to anarchists and overwhelmingly tend to serve middle-upper class families because their tuitions tend to be very high, but there are some notable exceptions.

My favorite is the Albany (NY) Free School, the oldest inner-city free school in the country, and as endearing a place as I have visited. It was founded by Mary Leue in 1969 when her son didn't want to go to school and has thrived to see five decades despite refusing all outside funding, including grants. Tuition is low and sliding-scale, often sliding to nothing, and the staff work hard and long for slim wages. There are usually around forty kids, largely drawn from the surrounding low-income neighborhood, and a large staff.

The school itself is run more or less on a classic Summerhillian model, but it is the school's emphasis on community that sets it apart so starkly from other free schools. It is located in a low-income section of the city, and actively aims for a racially and economically diverse demographic of kids and families, deliberately breaking the middle-class norm of most progressive independent schools. The tight group that runs the project has spun off into a number of community institutions including



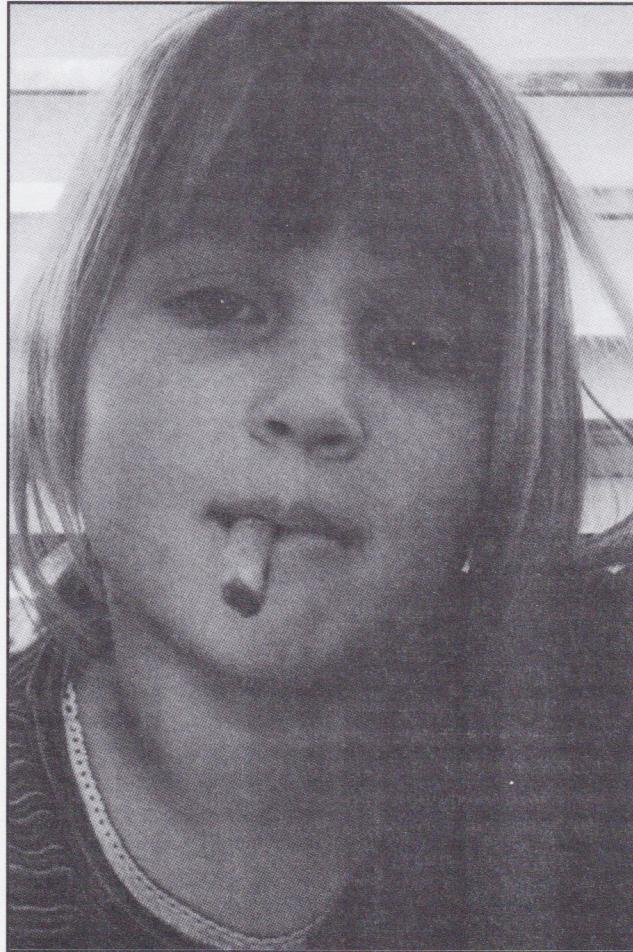
Big people helping with the new mural.

a midwifery/women's health clinic, a health food co-op, and a small bookstore. Over the years the school facilities have grown remarkably as well. They own their own building, the school has bought and renovated ten buildings in the neighborhood using them for staff apartments and for revenue generation, they bought a camp just outside the city, and most recently had donated to them a 250 acre piece of land for a wilderness centre and sanctuary.

In some ways it is probably a good idea not to draw too much from AFS' experience as they are clearly unusually successful, but it is fair to say that creating an independent school is possible and even viable virtually anywhere. Start your own place and you won't get paid well, you'll have to scramble for a long time, and it'll burn your time/energy like gas, but those are rarely good reasons to be daunted.

## **homeschooling/ homelearning**

An increasingly popular and in some way the most obvious answer to dismay in the face of



Sarah age 10 (with a french fry).

**schooling is simply not to go.  
Don't send your kids. Stay  
at home.**

Homeschooling is becoming so widespread that even Time magazine (!) was compelled to do a cover story on it. Despite the article's relatively sneering tone, idiotic commentary and focus on state responses, the point is obvious: there's something going on. By Time's estimation, "at least 850,000 students were learning at home in 1999, the most recent year studied; some experts believe the figure is actually twice that. ...In Canada the number of homeschoolers is believed to have increased by four or five times in the past five years."

Despite its growth and logic, there are a number of real issues to consider regarding homeschooling:

1. It is an appealing prospect for most parents to be able to stay at home and direct their kids' education, and it is also a horrifying prospect for most parents to have be with their kids 24/7.
2. Being able to tailor the schedules, learning styles, subjects, pace and direction of a child's learning potentially has huge benefits, but having kids miss out on socializing in the general milieu, figuring our how to deal with often-antagonistic bureaucracies and negotiate through the public sphere (collectively known as the "real world") is a worry, and
3. If staying at home with children full-time is only an option for two-parent, middle-class families, then how progressive is homeschooling?

Each of these has weight, but they are based on the strange notion that homeschoolers have to replicate the school day, style and curriculum at home, that parents have to stay home and teach just like schoolteachers would. Sure many parents do, but homeschooling can be homelearning: doing what makes sense educationally, however it might look. And the vast majority of homelearners that I know and know of are incredibly social and involved in the everyday world around them, in ways that schooled kids just don't have time or energy for. Not going to school doesn't mean just staying home, it

means kids have time and space to engage with the "real world" and design their own lives.

As David Guterson nicely put it: "Putting the child at the centre of her education does not put our culture, by extension, on the periphery; on the contrary, it lays the groundwork for successfully bringing the two together, for instilling in her a lifelong thirst for understanding her world."

Homeschooling/learning has a broad stroke and can look like anything parents and kids want it to (assuming you can get around and/or negotiate local officials). It has by its nature an appealing DIY logic, and an often anarchist aspect.

## **deschooling/ alternatives to school**

Deschooling (or unschooling) takes the homeschooling impulse one step further and questions the legitimacy of schooling itself as a pedagogical, political and cultural institution. Deschoolers don't want to go to school, and don't want to replace the process in their own homes. Compulsory schooling has only been part of North American life for 150 years but it has swiftly inculcated itself into every aspect of contemporary life. The idea that people, let alone children can explore the world, learn skills, gain knowledge and grow intellectually without centralized institutional direction is largely anathema.

There is no question though that kids do not have to go to school, any school, or accept the presumed exigency of schooling, to flourish, to get good jobs, to go to college, to travel, to succeed by whatever criteria they might set. There are kids in every part of the

world who are not wasting the vast bulk of their youth holed up in an institution they want no part of and living great, responsible, amazing lives.

In many ways though, deschooling, like homeschooling is more available and possible for kids with nice parents, kids with a little money in their family, kids who know how to access resources. To popularize and democratize deschooling we need institutions and networks that are open to all kids, not just middle-class ones. Maybe the best place to start with is a utility model, exemplified by the public library. Libraries are genuinely public, they are open to all, no one bugs you about what section you are reading in, no one tells you are dumb if you read sports books, you are not especially praised for reading particle physics, and there are always librarians there to help you find what you need. Libraries are in my estimation a fantastic community institution worth replicating.

Here in East Vancouver we have put together a centre we're calling an Alternative to School. A group of teens and an adult mentor (me) are running a small facility that operates something like a youth centre, but instead of just having pool tables and foosball, it runs a variety of community projects including a native youth exchange, a doc filmmaking project, a literary magazine, a public art project, a zine library, and also houses a couple of local youth-driven groups. Teens can come to the centre and hang out, drink coffee, work on their own project, use the equipment, visit or whatever. Most though, are involved in one or more of the many projects that are being run



through or by the centre, and are often working with mentors on other ideas. There is no expectation of attendance and there are always crazy things going on. It is one way available here to allow kids to sidestep school, engage with the community and build skills.

In the end, I think these might be three key questions for anarchists to ask of schools and schooling:

1. Is it possible that what one needs to know to grow up right cannot be determined by state bureaucrats?
2. Is it possible that a school (groups divided by age, teacher-led, core curriculum, institutional control, six hours per day, five days a week, twelve years) is not the optimal environment for all kids to flourish?
3. Is it possible that kids and families can direct their own learning (given community resources) in appropriate and reasonable ways?

The power of anarchist thinking is blunted if it becomes dogmatic, and I think it poison to try to define what anarchists should think about education or kids. The best parts of anarchism keep insisting that democracy has to be local, community is where political and economic power must lie, and hierarchical institutions cannot be made socially ecological.

To speak of resisting globalization is to speak of resisting centralization. Our everyday lives in this part of the world, especially for kids and parents, are filled with authoritarian control, and much of it flows from the logic of schooling. To acknowledge that

something is off is to take up the challenge of building something else, and there are more than enough examples and inspirations to get moving on it.

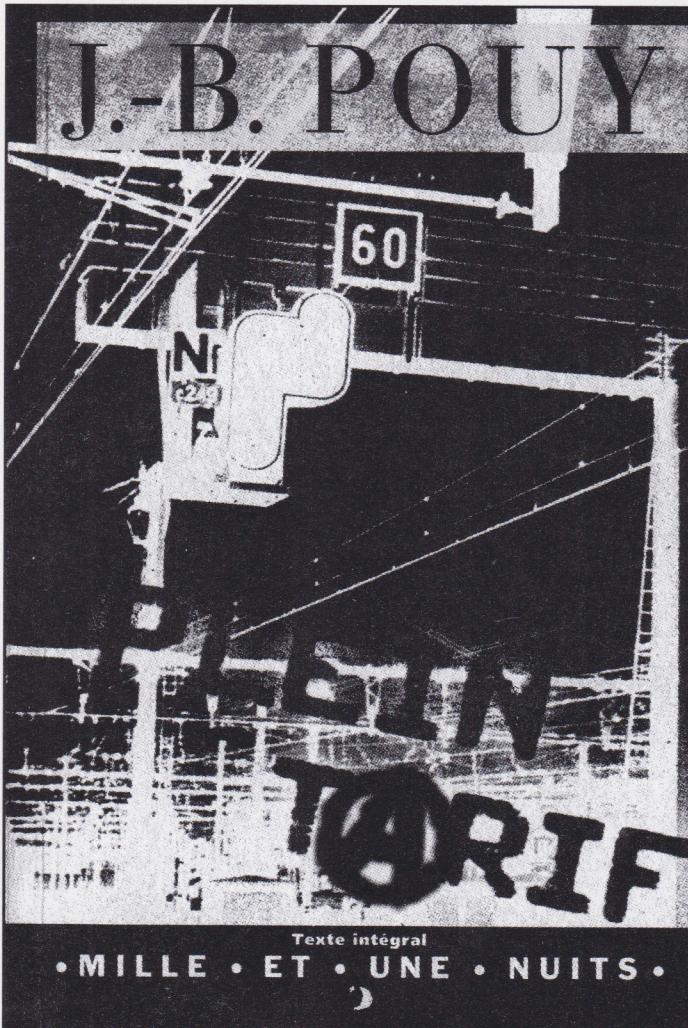




Photos by Raven

# THE WRETCHED OF THE RAILS

## BY JEAN-BERNARD POUY



*A translation of Plein Tarif  
(Paris: Mille et Une Nuits, 1994)*

*By Jean-Phillipe Gury and  
Robert Helms*

### Chapter 1

First, the smell. A wall of stench, somehow compact; a mixture of the foul odors of cold cigarettes, the perfumes of feet, exhalations of burnt fat, the mildewy smell of cheap wine, and farts blowing at twelve on

the Limburger scale. One hit makes you turn back along the road, immediately, makes you clean your mucous membranes with some Ajax.

But all this may also be some sort of rite of passage. If you reach the point where you mentally plug the nostrils; if you manage to block, between the nose and the brain, the work of the olfactory nerve, it'll be

all right.

I went to climb into the train car, as relaxed as an American entering an abandoned cheese cellar. But, thanks to a chronic throat infection, my nasal passages were not exactly sterile, and I could resist.

I had come to visit Uncle Guy.

...who I found in the second compartment, in the company of a fat woman in a duffel-coat who snored on the seat with her head leaning against a mutt, as filthy as his mistress....which started barking like a hyena as soon as I halted in front of the doorway.

"Fuck! Here's my family!" bellowed my uncle. "And they sent the little louse in the vanguard!"

"Hello, Uncle. I thought you hated to travel..."

"Shit, it's taken me seventy years to find a train that doesn't budge!"

This brought to mind the transit strikes of earlier years.

"How are you?"

"What do you care?"

"Have you validated your ticket?" That gave him a good laugh.

"Good. Maybe you're a bastard too, like the others, but you're just not as stupid."

## THE WRETCHED OF THE RAILS

I was used to it. The insults weren't for me. Even though he bitterly told me to leave him alone from time to time, Guy really loved me. These epithets were only directed at the members of his old entourage—precisely those against whom he had built this barrier, as effective as it was smelly.

I have a hobo uncle. That's how it is. After my aunt's death, from as cutting-edge a cancer as you could ask for, with the final moments so painful and catastrophic that it actually became the irrefutable proof of the non-existence of the deity, he'd had a depression as deep as 1929, and then, upon returning from a treatment of prescribed rest, he'd dropped everything, sold everything, spent everything, and become a tramp. But not even the "saintly" kind. Typically Parisian, Place de Vosges section. As long as you're bumming around on the street, you might as well choose an historic district; as long as you're crashing under a carriage entrance, it might as well be from the 17th—the Century, not the arrondissement.

When winter came, the whole family tried to take Uncle back under its wing, thus assuaging the guilty conscience they had for not having taken such good care of Auntie during her illness, and they tried to settle him in a warm place, with the secret hope of seeing him abandon this life, which had cast a purulent shadow over the whole clan. But he refused, telling all of us to take a hike, and remaining under the stars that were invisible in the city sky.

He had enough dough to survive, and Camembert, cheap wine, and

whiskey for holidays; all his junk stuffed into a dirty leather bag. His distinguishing mark: the shoes. There was no way he would ever go barefoot in the cold. His last remaining vanity: he would never wear split-open slippers on the roughness of the asphalt. The only beggar in Clarks. He always had great shoes, even if he never washed his feet.

"People put stinky cheese on silver plates, so, fuck it!" he would howl at me.

When I was passing through the Marais district, I would always end up finding him in one of the possible corners of his territory; we would chat for a moment, he'd invariably call me a slave, he'd send me back to my precious studies, and he would advise me instead to use my energies to wreak havoc in the family, the factory, or in society.

I liked him a lot, Uncle Guy. There were people who had generals in their families, or government ministers, but us, we had a tramp.

"You must have thought I croaked, eh? Did they pop open a bottle of Champaign, the pricks?"

"Not really. I was a bit worried, myself. Them, I don't know."

"Them, they can drop dead."

"They're already dead, you're always saying."

"They can drop dead again."

I had just found him in the second compartment of the third coach of the last train, and I was relieved because Uncle had disappeared for at least two full weeks, and we'd even called the morgue. They indeed had two vagabonds in their drawers, frozen, of course,

but it was two young ones.

I had wandered in the usual homeless shelters until I realized it was only here that I could track him down: the poverty train.

"You're cozy here. Almost Pullman. At least it's warm."

"Forget about it. You won't understand. But I'm happy to see you. I'll introduce you to my pals. It'll be good for your education; a nice change from those turkeys you hang with—because you're a chickenshit."

And then, carefully, I sat on the green vinyl seat, and quietly looked at the fat lady who was still snoring. The dog, on the other hand, had shut up. He was looking at me from the corner of his eye. I wasn't a friend, but not an enemy either. Then, Uncle slipped me a piece of Lanquetot cheese. He seemed to me like a Yaqui sorcerer, giving me my first hallucinogenic mushroom.

"You know, it's terrible," he continued, "of course it's warm here. But all of a sudden, all this chaos... People should come and visit us. With the poor people, it's not just penniless guys. There are drunks, too. Only the rot-gut makes you warm out there. When the blood boils, the meat doesn't freeze. They're living garbage dumps. And the grime keeps them warm the same way. There are sick people. It's incredible, how many diseases there are, lying around on the sidewalks. Poor folks, it's sad. It's mean. Every man for himself, since there's nothing to expect from others."

I had to agree, and I had my reasons.

"Yesterday in the Metro, I saw a

homeless girl, begging. Not too dirty, not too drunk, as you'd say. She was passing between the riders, her little hand cupped in front of her. She seemed to be thinking aloud. She was telling people that, the day before, someone had actually spit in her hand. Well, there was a guy sitting on a jump seat, and he gave her a 2000 franc note. She was stunned. She tried to give the money back, saying that it wasn't possible, that he shouldn't. The guy told her that he too was from the North, and that he'd recognized her accent. The woman started crying, holding onto the bar, by the door. At the next station, in tears, she said to the guy, "I'm sorry, I have to get off." She sat on the bench, just across from the door, and kept crying, curled up into herself."

"You see? You see?" Uncle bawled, sure of himself.

I didn't see anything, but I kept my mouth shut. The Camembert was sticking to my teeth. Guy passed me his bottle of red. I didn't even wipe off the mouth.

## Chapter 2

It's a month now since I tracked down Uncle in this fucking "poverty train," and now I was camping out there almost permanently.

The Empty Pocket Express. The Super Sleaze Special.

It seemed like a good idea in the beginning.

The first time it dropped to ten below zero Centigrade one December night, freezing over the northern half of France, public officials started to have the same original ideas, again, as they'd come up with the previous year:





opening the dilapidated Metro stations, First Aid stations, school cafeterias for use by the homeless; gymnasias transformed into overnight shelters—and into a Charlie Chaplin movie. The whole kit and kaboodle, the intense Mother Theresazation of the first days of winter.

But the *Société Nationale de Chemins de Fer* (SNCF) had for once distinguished itself: "Everything is Possible," ran their slogan. This time it wasn't a lie, and a few good ideas had created one which was nearly ingenious. Here in the sorting yards between the Masséna station and Ivry, not very far from Paris-Austerlitz, this station had been almost abandoned by travelers since the real trains—the ones that look like Boeings without wings—now leave from Montparnasse. The headquarters had had to pull one hundred mismatched cars for not being up-to-date or just too old. Some round-the-clock crews had attached them in a line, ten trains in all, on ten tracks. Some other crews, paid for by both the SNCF and the Ministry of Public Works, had made haste, so to speak, by connecting the electricity (provided gratis by the electric company) and the water. Some rinky-dink plumbers had linked all the cars with PVC pipes, with the whole thing going to a septic tank, which was dug in haste at the end of one of the tracks.

So here were a hundred train cars, with two thousand homeless people packed, seat by seat, perfectly housed in a cozy myth. The shitters at one end of each car, kitchenettes at the other end, doors that close, heat, easy-to-clean vinyl, curtains for those who prefer darkness, and the incredible feeling of stationary

travel. Some team of social workers acted as dispatchers and provided housing for this entire mob. A few people raised their voices in protest against the "penning" of such a crowd of destitutes, saying that there certainly were some ghastly precedents: in the Nazi "death trains," people were already traveling for free. Some other voices were offended by such an ugly thought, and an intense media barrage had the effect of calming the public's guilty conscience a little bit, by praising the new-found comfort, the bodies quite saved from the surrounding ice age, and the generosity of the SNCF. The dominant slogan was written by an ad man in the *Segueliste* paradigm: "*Sauvons Nos Clochards Friorifies* (save our frozen tramps)."

On the scene, it was a demented microcosm.

Coaches were full, but not overcrowded; there were groupings by affinity, there were smells, party-shouts, drunken screams, animal barks, brawls for the conquest of rediscovered love, or for the protection of some stingy territory. There was a semblance of order, a little of the civic spirit that had disappeared: forming a line at the toilets, the first thing that separates humans from other primates. Trashing empty bottles, helping the cripples get up and down, because without platforms, the steps get pretty high. Inside, there was an ill population, staggering along, desperate. There were wounds, mostly unseen, a pessimism that sometimes carried infection.

Outside, there were some social

activists, people distributing food; charitable organizations. There were journalists, all believing they could win the Pulitzer Prize, and some film makers, re-making *Viridiana*. And of course there were cops, watching out for squalls and making sure this survival zone didn't become a den of thieves.

The life of the body, the death of the soul.

"Better be careful with your dogs," a police official said. "You should put them on leashes!"

"Hey, who's the dog here?" a tramp responded. "Where's your leash, pal? If your boss tells you to sit, you sit, right? Well, my mutt's the same way."

"Watch your mouth! I'm not your pal!"

"Run along, back to your dog house!"

"You and your dog house. We'll send you back there sooner than you think. You'll see. If you think we're paying taxes just to pamper your gang of freeloaders..."

—And other terms of endearment. If the paupers were cozy, that was no reason to start liking the dicks.

### Chapter 3

Viewed from the outside, since the weather was becoming extremely continental, and since the blue sky was freezing all the surroundings, the camps had a Siberian aspect, an inner city, Mongolian tendency. One could almost see the horses and yaks grazing outside, the sparse, icy grass growing between the tracks. The friendly steam was escaping from the ten trains, and into the dominant shades of dark green, some new curtains were timidly

reappearing, some laundry trying to dry without crystallizing.

Some taggers and graffiti muralists of the area had even repainted some of the sides of the cars, getting bawled out by homeless people of the opposite aesthetic:

"You little bastards! Go tag the police trucks, instead of messing up the equipment!"

"Yeah, go on, call the bulls," came the reply. "What are you protecting? Your suburban house? Your garden- gnomes?"

"Buzz off, zombies, or we'll set the dogs on you!"

"You're the dogs!"

A few local bands would not have minded playing some basic Rock n' Roll, but the security force let them know that this was not a zoo filled with endangered and exotic species. And even less was it some discounted version of Zenith Hall.

In short, the poor should be left in peace, especially since the state, via the nicey-nice SNCF, had informed the population that all of this would only be short-term. Come spring, as soon as the temperature would no longer be synonymous with bronchitis and fatal pneumonia for Joe Homeless, the company would retrieve its equipment; would totally bleach and disinfect it, would stow it away for the following year and the next round of cold weather. Nothing definitive. It was an experiment, and like all experiments, they had to draw conclusions, put their bigwigs on the job (sociologists, ethnologists, etc.) to decide how to do it again, and better.

In view of the operation's success,

# THE WRETCHED OF THE RAILS

24

some voices, this time many of them, and unanimous, had spoken up for maintaining what were from now on called "the trains of life." These people knew very well that the authorities would not easily discontinue the project for at least one reason: the homeless people and other riff-raff, penned in far from the downtown area, would no longer make the streets of the capital and the Metro tunnels messy, just when the tourists arrive en masse to see the most beautiful city in the world. It would mean the end of open-air ablutions in the Wallace Fountains; the end of hotel rooms on the benches of public parks.

In addition, since the authorities had them right in front of them, these rejects, these outcasts, they could finally count them (to give them treatment, they'd say), and manipulate them (to prepare them for re-integration, they'd say).

The theoretical battle was rough. There were a few demos, bringing together only a handful of activists. The "fourth world" of urban homelessness always discouraged the ideologues. But article after article, declaration after declaration, the partisans of train-suppression won the day with the iron-clad motto, which had often been used already, "We must not manage want with indignity." The problem was not in the ghettoization, but in the integration.

Big words.

"I don't want to be integrated!" Uncle screamed.

## Chapter 4

Three months of peace.

Strange weeks during which I

was very often making the trip between my little room on Rue de Charonne and the tracks near Masséna Station.

All around this immobile pandemonium, the redevelopment was going full bore: the big new national library opened her four gigantic book-like wings of glass and steel, like the thighs of an intellectual courtesan. Masséna and its surroundings were passing from an old-style life to a modern death. The thunderous snores escaping from the train cars hardly covered the roars and crashes of the cement mixers.

I really don't know what was pushing me toward the poverty trains. Without having any ready answers in my mind, I was telling myself that, by helping Uncle, by bringing him smokes and, often, alcohol, I was doing my social duties. A bit like some do-gooder who visits prisoners. I went to the slammer once, in the local jail, to see a friend. Scary. Uncle was right: you have to see it to believe it. You have to know if you want to judge. I was speaking with people, trying to understand what was coming out of their wine-soaked reasoning. I wasn't arguing, just agreeing. Sometimes—rarely—some guys would develop an actual philosophy which was organized, coherent, and vengeful. They saw their fate as a punishment. They flogged themselves according to their cowardice and their lack of culture. They considered themselves an underclass, and very few of them retained not just the hope, but also the strength to fight with. Rather, they were participating in a long, slow suicide. Among the homeless, many were calling themselves

"terminally unemployed".

Terrible, lucid words.

It was probably the "traditional" tramps who were the most wound up. Among them, there were the advocates of the total rejection of any social order, some who had unusual lives, but almost always, there was the underlying resolution, healthy and definitive: Down with Work, and Death to the Pigs. This was what brought them closer to the anarchist activists who had rushed up there and who were camping at the site. The color black united them: that of the flag on the one hand, that of grime on the other.

Since setting foot in this little world, I had the feeling of usefulness. A fight I could handle. However, most of my time was spent making sure that supplies were arriving. The *Vieux Papes*<sup>1</sup> was flowing in rivers, but I had also convinced a few doctors to come and work overtime to provide emergency care on board. Mostly skin problems, and some ill-treated wounds. Follow-up treatment for bedsores and psoriasis. I was delighted to be elbow-to-elbow with these libertarians, who my family had made me swear never to hang out with, nor ever approach, convincing me by daily proselytizing and soft-core brainwashing that entropy, that chaos was barbarism, that the future lay in Social Democracy, and that everything else is just hard drugs and the like.

Uncle had introduced me, progressively, to his buddies, and had pointed out his enemies. His paranoia had chosen some who were very obvious, especially the ones who wanted to take his shoes. He made me visit. The

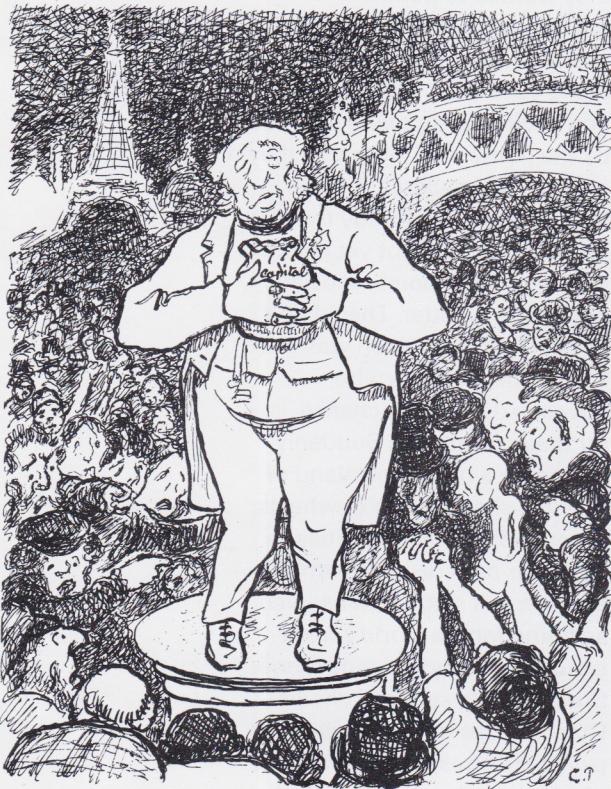
homeless, now that they had homes, were starting to decorate the compartments, trying to lighten the place up with some recycled junk, as though they wanted to perfume the atmosphere of filth and abandonment. We were far from being your basic IKEA store, but one couldn't help being surprised by the number of nicknacks they'd already accumulated. It hadn't occurred to them to tidy the place up, and they had not yet decided to form a neighbors' association, but it didn't matter. They didn't remain inactive, which was grist for the mill of those who advocated a second chance for these destitutes. Suddenly it became a huge wasteland of metal, a shanty-town of wheels, described by the authorities as a regular petri dish, a shameful chancre in a district that served as home for the world's most beautiful library; a danger zone. Some people spoke of cholera. Others spoke of it as an illegal psychiatric hospital; still others, of a hospice for dying alcoholics; the more "radical," of a concentration camp.

It was filthy, this is true. But it was a lot of fun! The idea that it would all come to an end was just intolerable.

<sup>1</sup> "Old Popes:" a cheap, fortified wine, similar to the U.S. labels Night Train and Thunderbird.

# OUTSIDE THE CIRCLE

## BORDER CROSSINGS



by Cindy Milstein

That which is avant-garde has always transgressed the boundaries of what is considered decent. Yet after the “shock of the new” has worn off, what was once widely perceived as subversive is often viewed by many as socially acceptable if not desirable. Anarchism, ever bohemian due to its utopian edge—even if anarchists see their principles as eminently applicable to the vast majority of peoples’ lives—continually throws itself against the next brick wall as soon as the previous one comes tumbling down. At least to date, then, the praxis of anarchism has voluntarily loitered at the border regions of society, remaining

outrageous, but seeing with every new frontier a sense of possibility.

For anarchists and other radicals, this can at times form the backdrop for a productive production. From the 1950s onward, new types of social movements challenged lines etched by everything from colonialism and racism to patriarchy and heterosexism. The uncertainty created by such border crossings has frequently been generative not just of civil unrest and the casting off of old masters but more expansive articulations of liberation. For example, by various movements pressing against the limits of what it means to love or be sexual, “sexuality” as

a category was enlarged to include gays and lesbians, then stretched to embrace bisexuals and later transsexuals, and recently further pried open by the contestation of “gender” as a binary concept. Even if heterosexism is far from eradicated, many peoples’ lived experience has improved; even if still confining, more social space has been created for greater self-determination around intimate issues such as partnering, sensuality, and kinship.

Then too, creative borrowings across borders is a defining feature of the contemporary anti-capitalist movement. The phrase “Our resistance is as transnational as capital” has itself become transnational—a copyright-free good to be used by all. Indeed, a clever idea at one demonstration or an innovative organizing strategy whisks around the world, to be playfully altered in an array of diverse locales and then reinvented elsewhere. There is now a rainbow of blocs at protests; home-made shields at direct actions are crafted out of materials ranging from inner tubes to giant shelled photos of global youth; and encuentros have beget consultas have beget grassroots social forums, if an exact lineage can even be traced. In this mutualistic economy of the imagination, we gladly share our ideas for globalizing freedom without need of trade agreements, without asking for bills of sales, national identification cards, or passports. And so it is that we cobble together a movement of movements without

borders, all the while asserting that "another world is under construction," as activists did at a recent gathering before the Europe Without Capital mobilization in Barcelona.

But whether figurative or literal, borders are places of displacement, marking out danger and potentiality in equal measure. For many, they signify trauma; a better life often isn't waiting on the other side. And more than ever, border crossings both geographic and cultural, material and emotional, are becoming compulsory points of no return for millions due to forces beyond their control.

The legacy of the anti-authoritarian Left could theoretically offer a framework to boldly approach and contest the legitimacy of the new, confusing divides being erected on a plethora of fronts. It could help ease the passage for those forced into migration and indicate a sense of home ahead. Anarchists, however, seem more comfortable causing disruptions at the old, familiar checkpoints—those guarding, say, culture or forms of resistance.

Not that such disruptions aren't necessary, especially dynamic ones; the best of radical artists retool when their creations become toothless. Still, the taboos and truisms of what is understood as "anarchism" unfortunately stand sentinel at the gates of our own promise to be much more relevant to many more people, in many more arenas. This would entail the discomfort of trudging through those barriers we've so far largely ignored.

Such dis-ease with one's place in the world isn't necessarily a matter of choice. The tragedy being writ large on the global

stage has broken down the boundaries between those who are displaced, the displacers, and those with a minuscule space of their own. All perform overlapping, frequently destructive if not deadly roles, and it is less and less clear who to applaud and who to boo in the improvisation titled "Globalization." For like the migration of transnational resistance, the much larger migration of peoples and commodities (and people as commodities) across all sorts of uncharted territories has in certain ways unhoused us all. The current battle over national borders—the effort to maintain an increasingly elusive and illusory national identity—is one case in point. Here, the displaced and the displacers, and those effected by both, all wrestle to define who has a right to a home in the alleged homeland. Whether fought with rocks or bullets, suicide bombers or ballot boxes, this is less a turf fight between or within states than it is about who belongs to "my people". It is a struggle over who counts as "us" versus "them" based on various and variously contrived criteria of authenticity such as race, religion, or historical injustices. It is a war without winners that alleges, like George W., that there are those who do good (us) and those who do evil (them), and no coexistence between such opposites is possible.

Yet the very act of naming these dualisms—never neatly contained to begin with—indicates that they are at risk of dissolving altogether. The displacements, hybridities, and interdependencies that globalization is making apparent, if not exacerbating, are eroding what meager ground was left for such bipolar thinking. That

could offer hope for transnational identities, a qualitative humanism based equally on solidarity and differentiation. But in a world that affords little security for much of humanity, holding fast to one's "people," however fraught with contradictions, at least supplies the veneer of home. Such is the foundation, for example, of a nouveau fascism that transgresses the contours of Nazism. Suddenly, it's "rad to be trad" in the Netherlands, where culturally liberatory sexuality bonds with politically racist ideology in a refashioned far Right.

The parameters of today's barbarism must be recognized in order to be fought, and that entails addressing its own barrier-breaking logic; how, for one, it feeds on many peoples' genuine concern over the loss of community and individuality—such that in the Netherlands at least, the xenophobe can be queer. Countering such an ugly avant-garde before its notions become normative requires that we too straddle previously non-contiguous spaces. For instance, in a United States permeated by racism, perhaps anarchism's antistatism should openly grapple with the necessity of certain forms of national identity as meaningful though not sufficient to people of color in their struggle for freedom (or as Ashanti Alston argues in the spring 2002 *Onward*, "Beyond nationalism, but not without it"). Attempting such thorny trespasses might just determine whether we continue to play in the refuse of capitalist society, always at its fringes, or can instead offer a semblance of refuge to those made vulnerable at its many points of migrations.

# WOULD YOU SHOPLIFT "DAYS OF WAR, NIGHTS OF LOVE"?

**Butch Lee**

"What 'insurance' could you buy that would keep you safer than living in a world where people actually cared for each other?"  
(page 260)

## Get the uzi!

Some man i'd never met before handed this book to me at a meeting, and mumbled something about reviewing it. Lucky wimmin get to review six course dinners or new CDs, but i get to review a fucking polish sausage. Which is to say i'd rather be talking about women's armed struggle against men & their insane and inane cultures. But there it is. And then again, i'm something of a maoista.

Let's get to the point. There's bitching about this book, but no airline ticket is good for all times and all places. There is no all-day sucker, only suckers. The subtitle on this book is "Crimethink for Beginners" and that's just what it is. So if you know someone young trapped in the suburban box, this is pages that might get them to see life from a different doorway. If you know someone young and suburban who has heard the word "anarchism" but knows nothing else about anything, lay this on them. "Days of Blah, Nights of Barf" is for beginners. An introduction that's not too heavy and might be a gust of fresh air.

Maybe they'll get a subversive laugh, a hint of rebellious spirit, maybe a seed planted in their mind.

And "Days" is real easy to slide into, since it's not really a long book. It's like fifteen short essays on breaking with boring, regimented capitalist life. There's tons of pictures, funny sarcastic cartoons, little boxed examples of

this or that from what some rebels actually did. And you don't even have to take it that reverentially (it isn't as though the authors were doing something real, like fixing the brakes on your truck). Start reading it anywhere, skip pages, go backwards, don't worry, it's all the same. The CrimethInc people who put this together really designed a clever "book", that's a contrast to the usual thick books loaded with information that we're supposed to learn from. Here there's almost nothing to learn, which is so liberating.

To me, the thing I like best about "Days" is that it brings out how barren the life of the spectator is. It challenges the spectatorism, the viewerism of passive virtual life in middle class capitalism. With its passive anti-sports (ten chemical-saturated dicks play, ten million overweight dicks sit and watch) and video game "challenges" and televised "relationships". At its best, "Days" is provocative and thought-provoking, happily starting trouble for straight, middle class goal-seeking suburban youth.

"Whatever each [of] us may be looking for, we all tend to pursue our desires by purchasing images: symbols of the things we desire. We buy leather jackets when we want rebellion and danger... When we want to live in a different world, we buy political pamphlets and bumper stickers. Somehow we assume that having all the right accessories will get us the perfect lives. And as we construct our lives, we tend to do it according to an image, a pattern that has been laid out for us... At our jobs, we exchange our time, energy, and creativity for the ability to buy these symbols... Rather than satisfying our needs, these products multiply them: for to get them,

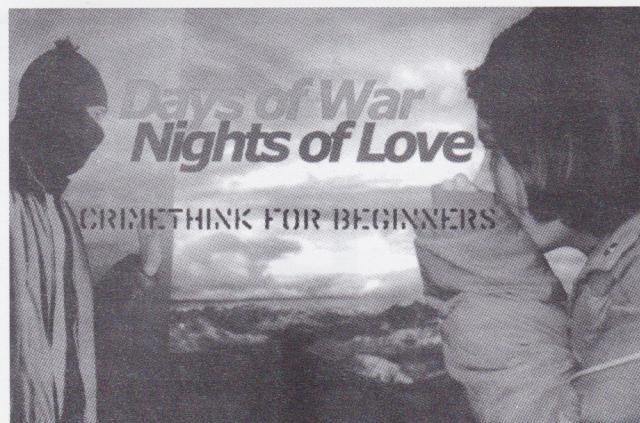
REVIEW  
Days of War,  
Nights of Love

we must sell our lives away."

What I dislike most about the book is that as a woman, as a trans-person, there's no ability in it to fight back against being obliterated. It's as though they're saying that if you just switch your little mind to a different mental station then you can be free and running. That's just bullshit. In fact, that's just the empty pursuit of symbols and images that they put down. You can't be free in a world that isn't free, and we have the fucking scars from the mine fields to prove it. Though they don't say it, these aren't new ideas in their book. Mined out of seventy year old dada and surrealism, but could dada defeat the nazis? Here's some free advice: Let someone else test that—don't you bet *your* life on it.

You can see what I mean by checking out their heavy advocacy of shoplifting. "Days" really blasts off on this: "...shoplifting makes me feel liberated and empowered". Or "Everything changes when I shoplift." Or "Shoplifting says NO to all the objectionable features that have come to characterize the modern corporation." And on and on. Dumpster diving is also a big deal in the CrimethInc ideology. I think only superprivileged people talk this phony way, folks sitting on top of the rest of the human race but playing at being someone else.

Hey, we should entertain the really revolutionary far-out daring novel idea of...shoplifting? Hel-lo! Earth to CrimethInc! Wake up! Any of you ever worked for a living at a store? Oh, I forgot, working is giving in to the corporations. Well, then, let me tell you the news that in real life millions and millions of Americans of every class, age, race and genders are shoplifting like mad weasels. It's the fucking national sport. My roommate once had a richass white grandmother stuff a baby carriage with a baby in it full of shit and race full speed out the store shouting, "If you try and stop us and my baby granddaughter is injured we'll



sue you!" Hostage shoplifting.

And you think the oppressed should shoplift what they need? Oh, they'll really appreciate your teaching them, kemosabi. Hey, ever been in an inner city corner store with its bulletproof plexiglass inner walls, where you point out the canned soup or soap you want and the clerk hands it out to you through the revolving tray—after you slide your money in? The oppressed have been shoplifting and stealing and ripping off since long before any of you were conceived of. And guess what, they aren't "liberated" or "empowered" yet.

Talk of subverting the system is cheap, but other people are being run over by the reality of it. The families who literally live their entire lives in the giant garbage dumps in the Philippines, living off of sifting for the scraps of cloth, metal, bottles or food, they're the pros at dumpster diving and the white people here who do it are just posers at worst and amateurs at best. But those Filipino families aren't "subverting the system" at all, they're just struggling to survive. Life isn't a spectator game for most wimmin in the world. It's all too real—AIDS, malaria, rape, being really sick and still having to labor twelve hours a day on your feet. Dying young knowing that no one is going to take care of your kids. Sometimes this book is itself a spectator sport, privileged folks having the thrill of playing at life. As that possum said, "We have met the enemy, and they is us."

# B A D D O G

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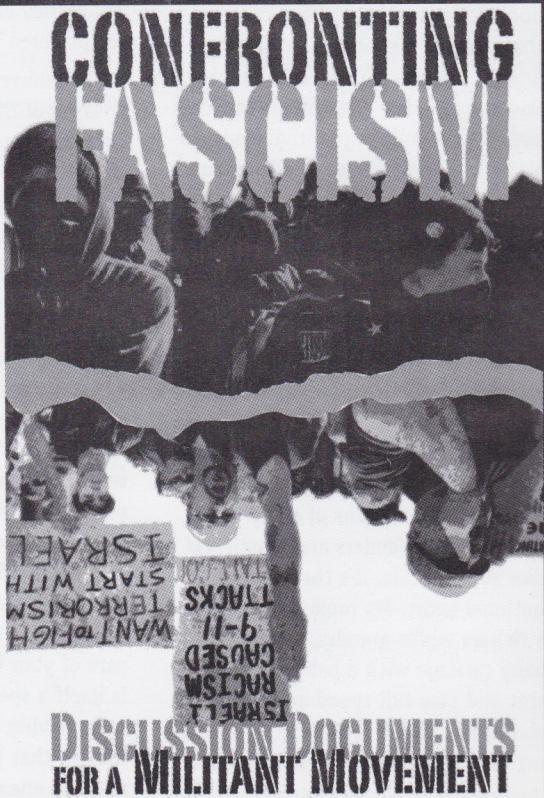
**Confronting Fascism: Discussion  
Documents for a Militant Movement**

*Published by Chicago Anti-Racist  
Action, Arsenal and Kersplebedeb*

The struggle against fascism is a widely accepted part of the revolutionary struggle, but even the most radical activists often sound like liberals when explaining the hows and whys of anti-fascism... The essays in Confronting Fascism are an attempt to grapple with this situation.

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# ARM IN ARM WITH THE PRINCESS GONORRHEA OBSERVATIONS ON BUILDING A MEDICAL AFFINITY GROUP

by Lysa Brash Spice

This article explains a little bit about the history of the health care collective I was a part of in Portland, OR for the last 2 years: how we started, what the first few months were like, what work we decided initially to do, and what some of the strong points of the collective were. It also talks some about things that I wish had gone differently, things that were hard for me personally, and then offers some basic suggestions for building something similar.

The Black Cross Health Care Collective formed in January of 2000, just after the WTO protests in Seattle. The vast majority of the first members (we started with 8 or 9 people, and have grown to 12) were medics in Seattle. But for the most part we weren't hooked into the Medical structure there and took care of folks in the streets either alone or with a partner.

Most of the first Black Crossers knew each other from a radical nurses group that had tried to form in Portland the year before, but they hadn't had a clear agenda and quickly disbanded. The first folks were all-but-one health "professionals"; EMTs, herbalists, nurses, nurse practitioners and a physician's assistant student. Most people were linked to the other people through friendships.

It was a bit awkward at first, but also really, really exciting. It was



apparent to all of us that we were needed, that our work was clear and would be useful. At the first or second meeting someone suggested that pepper spray, and specifically the lack of something to make people feel better after being sprayed, was a real problem, and that maybe one of our first projects should be doing some trials to find an antidote in some kind of reasonably controlled and scientific manner. People were also excited about developing a basic first aid training to offer to Portland activists, doing some writing projects, maybe including a first aid manual and also offering medical care in the streets at demos in Portland and on a national scale.

In my mind, the first 6 or 9 months of Black Cross were golden and perfect somehow. In some bizarre fluke of incredible luck our meetings were completely painless. I think most of us even looked forward to them. There was always dinner, which helped, but more than that there was mutual respect and a complete lack of animosity. Because the group was so small we all, over time, ended up with fairly distinct roles that fit together in a sweetly complementary fashion. There was a medically savvy but politically inexperienced woman who asked the questions that we all overlooked, someone else with a wellspring of enthusiasm, others who were calm, or always followed through, or reminded us why we liked each other. This isn't to say it was all peaches and soy cream. I was frequently annoyed and more than frequently annoying. But it was the first time in my life that I was truly willing to see my personal ideas and judgments as less important than the harmony of the group, and this allowed me to try harder, and care more about our internal dynamics than I ever had in any previous group.

I think a big part of how well things went for me was having medical peers. People who knew as much, and far more, about medicine than I did. I had just come from a project where I was supposed to be the medical expert and had botched this job so badly that I never wanted it again. I was thrilled beyond measure not to have this role. One of the things that really worked well in Black Cross was that our competence level was high. The people with little or no

medical experience knew their limits well and fulfilled crucial roles, and those of us with more medical experience usually knew what we were doing. We trusted each other's medical competence, and were able to rely on each other in progressively more tense situations.

Another big "what worked" was the crucial 'right place, right time'. We hit on the pepper spray idea as it was being used more and activists were increasingly targeted with it. We saw our work as important, and even when we felt like dropping the ball we were reminded that we were being looked to by at least a few people to finish the trials and generate some ideas. It kept us working and kept us motivated. This was true of other work as well. The 2000 May Day Demo in Portland was heavily targeted by police, which kept us focused on being a presence at local demos and refining our street medic skills.

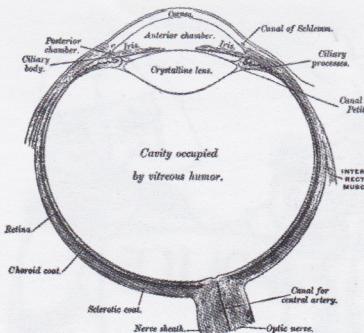
A few other things really worked well. One was that we learned together. We started knowing very little about pepper spray and its treatment. So what we learned we learned together. This gave us a sort of collective consciousness about stuff. There was very little practical difference between what we thought as individuals and what Black Cross thought. We hashed stuff out, but in the end we came to basically unified positions and were able to present a unified front on most issues. This I think was helped by most other people's even-keeled personalities and my drive to subvert my own stubbornness for group health. It worked. There was very little internal quarreling about issues and no public animosity. This unity of ideas and

basic respect for each other's work was to be our greatest strength.

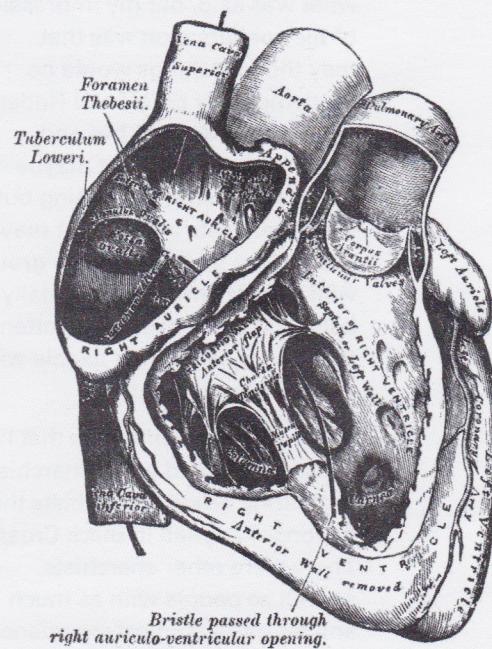
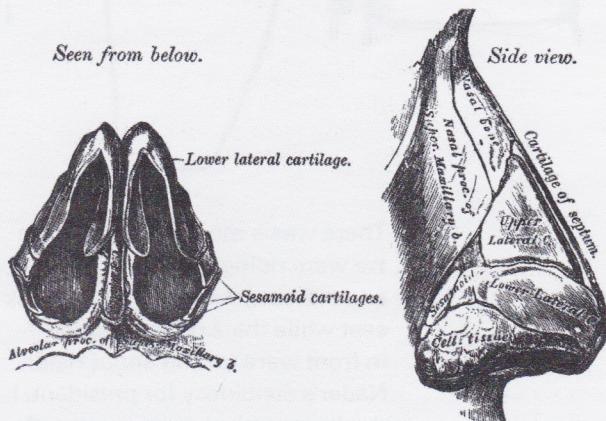
My last and favorite Black Cross charm is that we had fun. We early adopted infectious disease names (finding them far more charming than forest names). We later moved to Spice Girls names. Right before I left Portland there was a movement a-foot to amass naughty nursie outfits so that we could come running through clouds of tear gas to save the day armed with special remedies and wearing gas masks, sensible shoes, and short white nurses' dresses...

In August of 2000, just over half of us went to LA for the demos around the Democratic Convention. We went in a role almost diametrically opposed to the ones we'd had in Seattle. We were to be responsible for the medical trainings at the convergence space and help staff and coordinate the clinic there. These situations, as most of us know, are stressful, and though there was some strife in the larger group that took responsibility for medical stuff there was none with or in Black Cross. We got along well with each other and were able to present a unified front. We were able to say, "Black Cross will take responsibility for that", and know that among the 6 of us we'd work out who had the time or would do it best. It was difficult to dislike or resent us, because even if one of us drove you crazy, it was ill advised to piss off the lot of us. We were far too necessary.

We rarely talked about political ideology or experience, though it was obvious there were differences. We adopted the disagreement-is-bliss philosophy



Seen from below.



Illustrations taken from Gray's Anatomy.

and it held up for a long time. Gradually though I started to get frustrated.



There was a moment in LA when we were riding around in a car and I remember sitting in the back seat while the 2 women sitting in front were talking about Ralph Nader's candidacy for president. I don't remember anymore exactly what was said, but my impression of the conversation was that they thought things would be fundamentally different if Nader won. And I sat there hot and sticky and thinking that maybe it was time I started hanging out with anarchists again. That maybe I wanted to be in an affinity group with people who fundamentally believe that the system is rotten to the core, instead of fixable with a different president.

There were a lot of things that I'd taken for granted as an anarchist organizing among anarchists that no longer applied in Black Cross. There were other anarchists, as well as people with as much and far more political experience than me. But there was very, very little political agreement or even discussion. I think we all became somewhat more "politicized" through the process but it was all anchored in the concrete.

We never read books about revolutionaries doing medicine, or talked about the role of medicine in revolution. Never. Not even socially.

There are a few other things that I think made Black Cross a less than perfect revolutionary cell. The simplest and most obvious is that people had other, very real lives. The flip side of having fabulous comrades who are older and have dedicated substantial parts of their lives to learning a trade is that they are older and have dedicated substantial parts of their lives to learning a trade. People had families, kids, school loans, owned their houses, worked real jobs, had partners. They were busy and had commitments that they were more committed to than the collective. Over time the newness of the collective wore off and people went back to prioritizing their real lives. I think this could have been offset if we hadn't been so geared towards those with lots of medical skills. If we'd have had more of a mix (as seems to be happening in my absence) those with more skills could have trained those with less, who could have slavishly dedicated themselves to the collective in turn.

Along this same line, many of us were not very connected to the radical community. Because we were busy, and older, and many of us socialized mainly with each other, we had a hard time both figuring out where we were needed and getting out information about our trainings and projects to the folks who would have been interested.

Being in Black Cross was one of the coolest experiences of my

life. We were able to do some impressive projects, including finding and testing the pepper spray remedy that I saw filling most medic's pockets at a recent demo in Canada; write a guide to first aid; provide medical support to numerous local and national demos; and most important provide a model, to ourselves and maybe to the larger community of a collective of skilled people who are able to work together and share their skills with a high degree of mutual respect and cohesion. Some things still sucked. Political unity was a stumbling block and got harder as the honeymoon ended. There was also a gulf, in terms of time and energy, between what the collective needed to thrive and what people were able to commit.

So, what are my suggestions—if someone dies and makes me god what would I grant you for your medical collective? What can you take away from this in starting your own medical (or something else) affinity group?

- Fun. Eat, drink alcohol, go to the movies or out to bars together after the meeting. Integrate fun firmly and completely into work. Never compromise on fun even if you compromise on work.
- Power sharing. Have many experts, not one. It's fabulous to have an expert on herbs, or trauma, or teaching, or group process, but think again if all these experts are the same person.
- Conversation. About politics, about medicine, about visions. Not too early, but neither too late.
- Trust. Make sure that people

are up to a skill level (medical and interpersonal) that's comfortable to the majority of people. Work to get them there. If they can't get there, *kick them out.*

- Non-attachment. Medicine, I struggle to learn, has many right answers to every question. The less you think yours are the right ones, the more you get to learn. This is hard, especially for those of us invested both in medicine and in being right.
- Joint ownership. Learn things together. Make things *y'all's* instead of yours.
- Real work. Work together early and often. Get used to each other's styles, etc. (Before you unknowingly wade through clouds of tear gas arm in arm with an anxiety prone asthmatic.)
- Some (but not all) people whose primary commitment is to medicine and to the project.
- Luck.

There are other medical collectives scattered across the US and Canada, as well as other places for sure. Many have styles and organizational structures very different than Black Cross, and you can find links to their web sites, as well as learn more about us by looking at our web site at [www.blackcrosscollective.org](http://www.blackcrosscollective.org).

# POLITICAL REPRESSION IS ALIVE AND KICKING IN THE CITY OF BROTHERLY LOVE

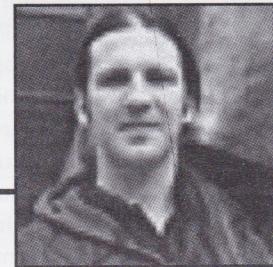
## Keep Camilo Viveiros out of Prison!

**O**n August 1, 2000 during the Republican National Convention in Philadelphia over 400 people were arrested in an effort to suppress people's freedom of speech and right to protest. The heavy handed approach that the police used is nothing new in Philadelphia, a city that has a long and brutal history of police misconduct and violence. The antics of the police have not held up in court and the majority of the cases were thrown out or the defendants were acquitted.

Unfortunately this has not been the case with Camilo Viveiros, a tenant organizer from Southeastern Massachusetts, who is being accused of assaulting a police officer with a bicycle. Former Police Commissioner Timoney claims to have been involved in the alleged incident which significantly raises the profile of the case. Camilo could potentially face a very lengthy sentence if convicted on his charge of first-degree assault. Camilo's trial date has been set for October. It is up to all of us to send a

clear message to the police, courts and District Attorney

that it is unacceptable for them to ruin an innocent man's life in an attempt to intimidate and scare people from expressions of dissent.



### What you can do to help

Fundraise to cover legal expenses. Organize events to raise awareness about the case. Table or speak at concerts and other events. Arrange for a speaker to come to your school. Write letters to the editor. Write letters of support. People that were out on the streets on August 1st may have relevant information for the defense. Contact [stayingstrong@hotmail.com](mailto:stayingstrong@hotmail.com) for with any questions or for more information about the case or go to the web-sight at [friendsofcamilo.org](http://friendsofcamilo.org). Checks can be made out to "Friends of Camilo" and mailed to Friends of Camilo, P.O. Box 23169, Providence, RI 02903



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*Sylvia-Rae Riviere*

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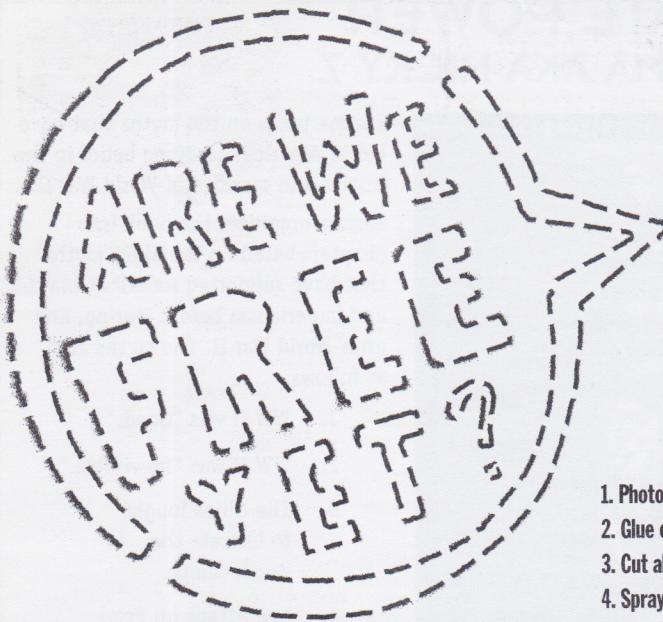
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1. Photocopy this stencil.
2. Glue copy to a piece of cardstock.
3. Cut along dotted lines.
4. Spraypaint through stencil onto "free" postcards.

As corporations find new ways to colonize our social landscape and our minds, it becomes more and more important that we develop new ways to resist. As capital is using artists and designers more and more as the intellectual grease that eases their advertisements and ideology into our heads, it is increasingly important that revolutionary artists and designers fight back. Strategies such as billboard liberation are great, but billboards are far from the only way companies attack. We need to be ready to fuck

with any and all means they use. This "Free" project is one way I've developed to address the onslaught of free advertisement postcards that flood most major cities. By using a stencil and spraypaint anyone can quickly and easily change hundreds of these postcards and return them to racks they came from. This both screws with the message of the advertisement and makes clear to all who picks up a card that the normally uninterrupted flow of information from corporation to consumer has been disturbed.



# SAVING PRIVATE POWER

## BY MICHAEL ZEZIMA AKA MICKY Z



By Mia Culpa

In the last few years, America has experienced a revival of World War II nostalgia brought about by such films as Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan* and Tom Hanks' *Band of Brothers*. Most recently, NBC news anchor Tom Brokaw added his contribution with his book, *The Greatest Generation*, documenting the supposedly unparalleled heroism and bravery of the World War II generation. This brand of admiration bordering on obsession has gone virtually unquestioned in past decades; after all, who can question the integrity of the generation that saved us from the pure evil of Hitler? The answer is self-educated historian Michael Zezima aka Mickey Z. In his new book *Saving Private Power: The Hidden History of "The Good War"* (a none-too-subtle jab at Spielberg's blockbuster film),

Saving Private Power

Zezima takes on the myths that have led to America's undying belief in the justice and sacrifice of World War II.

Zezima organizes the book into chapters based on the eight myths that have supported America's bravado and imperialism before, during, and after World War II. The myths are as follows:

1. WW II was "Good."
2. WW II was "Inevitable."
3. The Allies fought to liberate the death camps.
4. The Attack on Pearl Harbor was a surprise.
5. Only the Axis nations committed war crimes.
6. The atomic bombs dropped on Japan were necessary.
7. WW II was fought to end fascism.
8. The legacy of WW II is "Good."

Zezima writes with an undeniable furor, throwing down the gauntlet to challenge the history books. His research is exhaustive, with seemingly endless support for his arguments. However, at times he does appear to get ahead of himself making eager jumps in logic, as in the case of a 1941 photograph of Jesse Owens competing in the Berlin Olympics featured in the opening pages of the book. The caption accompanying the picture reads: "American Sports Hero Jesse Owens won four gold medals at the Berlin Olympics, effectively disproving fascism in a single bound. Hitler refused to shake his hand." Can Zezima really believe this statement considering his own documentation of the various fascist regimes firmly in place at the time of this picture?

Zezima creates a nice image, but it's an awfully naive statement for a historian. Apparently Owens isn't the only one making an impressive leap. This naiveté is apparent at different moments in the book, particularly in the preface as Z writes: "Sure the allies won and ultimately, that's a very good thing—but it doesn't mean they did it fair and square," (p. 2). This seems like a grand understatement of the obvious. Does Zezima honestly believe that Americans care whether or not their country played fair and square when fighting an enemy like Hitler? The "all's fair in love and war," philosophy would certainly justify the resulting victory over Nazi Germany in the hearts and minds of America. There are more pressing questions which Zezima later addresses such as: Was the American government truthful to its public? Were American motives as honest and good as the politicians want(ed) us to believe? The obvious answer to any radical thinking person is "No." But does that prepare the reader for the depth and extent of the corruption and lies encompassed by the American campaign in WW II? It may surprise and shock even the most politically aware. This is the heart of Zezima's argument and by the first few pages of the book he has you thoroughly engaged.

In forming his case, Zezima's critical eye leaves no one unexamined and by the end of the book, the sense of complicity is nearly overwhelming. In fact, there were passages in which I questioned the purpose of his suspicions, whether they served for shock value or historical record as when he questions the words of a retired Israeli Air

Force Colonel and holocaust survivor with obvious sarcasm: "What did this man learn from an unspeakable trauma? Did Col. Leron find meaning from his experiences? Judge for yourself."

"What kept me alive was the feeling of revenge: that I have to come out and kill these people... My main motivation to stay alive was to seek revenge from the Germans" (p. 72).

Zezima goes on, sarcastically referring to the Colonel's words as "enlightened." Although I suppose I understand the point he is trying to make, I wonder at Zezima's condescension towards this statement. The implication seems to be that the only "correct" response for a survivor of violence is pacifism. Who is he to so arrogantly judge what meaning should be found from such an experience as the Holocaust? And does this mean that a desire to commit violence equals the act of violence (systematic genocide)? I don't believe this is the statement the author is trying to make, but his choice of examples and lack of context is problematic at best. As in this case, it's easy to succumb to the temptation of the soundbite so to speak, but a worthwhile historical study must allow time enough to examine these details. Being one of the first to directly address this subject, Zezima has vast amounts of material to cover which can give the reader the feeling that he is glossing over certain issues after spouting off a list of facts or quotes without any context other than endnotes. While this is a problem of the book, I don't hold Zezima particularly at fault

for this short-coming because he does well with the amount of material he has to cover. It only draws attention to the need for more books, films, etc. on this subject with Zezima's candor and without the Hollywood spin.

Overall, Zezima's argument is clear, compelling, and easy to read. The story should be anything but surprising, and yet it's often downright shocking. He manages to firmly link US interests in WW II with the protection of Capitalism over Humanity, and the defeat of Communism rather than Fascism. More than providing historical answers, Zezima raises crucial and difficult questions just as relevant to the events of today as to the events of fifty and sixty years ago. The book closes with a quote from Noam Chomsky:

"...To understand the truth about these matters is to be led to action that may not be easy to undertake and that may even carry significant personal cost" (p.185),

and a call from Zezima, himself, for organizing, action, and sacrifice to prevent future wars. Saving Private Power is a timely read; after all, you don't have to be a history buff to recognize the eerie similarities to the current global political situation and the blind patriotism that surrounds us following 9-11. George W. is no doubt taking lessons from the propaganda tactics used by his father, and his father's father before him to lead the US in yet another bloody war to protect America's true national interest: Big Business.

